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AUTHOR Lane, Shelley D.
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ABSTRACT

Community college students can be characterized by factors that typically relate to students at-risk. On the whole, community college students are members of minority groups, older, attend school on a part-time basis, have taken on family responsibilities, and are less well-prepared than students in four-year colleges and universities. Although most community colleges utilize special programs and courses designed to reach at-risk students, it is the professor who plays the pivotal role in helping at-risk students achieve academic success. Community college professors in general, and speech communication professors in particular, can reach out to at-risk students in a variety of ways. Inside the classroom, they can provide relevance and structure in their everyday lessons. They can also involve students in the learning process, communicate the benefits of successful completion of coursework, and motivate students to achieve. Additionally, community college professors must communicate caring and concern for students, and they can encourage students to succeed by implementing educational support strategies. Outside the classroom, speech communication professors can reach out to at-risk students by interacting with them during office hours, by engaging in special activities, and when participating in student advising sessions. (Nineteen references are included.) (Author/SR)

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The speech-communication professor at the community college: Reaching out to at-risk students to achieve academic success

Abstract

Community college students can be characterized by factors that typically relate to students at-risk. On the whole, community college students are members of minority groups, older, attend school on a part-time basis, have taken on family responsibilities, and are less well-prepared than students in four-year colleges and universities. Although most community colleges utilize special programs and courses designed to reach at-risk students, it is the community college professor who plays the pivotal role in helping at-risk students achieve academic success. Community college professors in general, and speech-communication professors in particular, can reach out to at-risk students in a variety of ways. Inside of the classroom, speech-communication professors can provide relevance and structure in their everyday lessons. They can also involve students in the learning process, communicate the benefits of successful completion of coursework, and motivate students to achieve. Additionionally, community college professors must communicate caring and concern for students, and they can encourage students to succeed by implementing educational support strategies. Outside of the classroom, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by interacting with students during office hours, engaging in special activities, and when participating in student advising sessions.

Shelley D. Lane, Ph.D
Dep't of Speech-Communication
Collin County Community College
2800 E. Spring Creek Pkwy.
Plano, TX 75074
(214)881-5821

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The speech-communication professor at the community college: Reaching out to at-risk students to achieve academic success

Introduction

Rationale

At-risk students, or "academically underprepared students, are those students with distinctive characteristics that are perceived by the academic community to place them at a disadvantage in contention with the vast majority of students who enter college with the academic skills necessary for success in college" (Moore & Carpenter, 1985, p. 96). Moore and Carpenter (1985) suggest that the characteristics associated with underprepared students can be classified according to two dimensions; those that are measurable and those that are vague and speculative:

> The evident and measurable dimensions include, but are not limited to, erratic academic performance both in high school and as college freshmen, unimpressive standardized test scores, low socioeconomic background, race, gender, and rate of persistence and withdrawal from college. The vague and speculative dimensions which cannot be measured with precision include depressed motivation; poor abstract and conceptual skills; low self-esteem; poor self-concept; unclear goals; and being culturally deficient, verbally passive, and educationally disadvantaged. (p. 96)

Similarly, at-risk students include members of minority groups, older women, war veterans, employees who have been laid off or

who are attempting to change careers, and individuals who chose to delay entering college (Moore & Carpenter, 1985).

It is interesting to note that the conceptualization of the typical community college student reflects just those characteristics that describe students who are at-risk:

> Community college students are likely to be, on average, less wealthy, members of minority groups, older, part-time, working, and less well prepared than students in four-year colleges and universities. Community colleges provide an open door to post-secondary education for adults (and sometimes high school students with dual enrollment) living in a community college district. The students have often taken on family responsibilities . . . . The students in a typical community college are far more heterogeneous than those of a liberal arts college or university . . . two-thirds of community college students are part-time (compared with one-third for four year public institutions, and . . . these students "are" different from the traditional 18 - 20 year old full time student (Miller, 1984, p.6)

Because community college students can be characterized by the same factors associated with students who lack the background and skills necessary to succeed in college, it is imperative that community college professors recognize the important role they play in reaching out to these particular students. While it is true that most community colleges offer remedial education and may employ counselors whose specific duties include

interacting with such students, experts agree that faculty involvement in working with at-risk students is necessary (Beal & Noel, 1980; Haughey, 1982; Roueche & Roueche, 1985). Similarly, Roueche and Roueche (1985) claim that no matter what the organization has instituted and no matter what programs have been put in place, "the unquestionable pivotal point in the educational system has been, and will always be, the teacher" (p. 283). Therefore, faculty involvement is critical in working with at-risk students at the community college level.

Purpose

If one agrees that faculty should be involved in working with at-risk students, what can community college professors do to reach out to at-risk students and help them achieve academic success? In general, academic success entails activating students "to think, to learn, to apply, to evaluate, to synthesize, and finally, to grow" (Roueche, Baker, OmahaBoy, & Mullins, 1987, p. 170). Specifically, academic success involves achievement from freshman year to graduation, and effective functioning after graduation (Community College Consortium, 1991; Forrest, 1982). Community college professors in general, and speech communication professionals in particular, can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level in a variety of ways. These methods do not add to already overburdened workloads, nor do they detract from the teaching-learning processes associated with students who are not academically deficient.

In order to help at-risk students achieve academic suc-

cess at the community college level, two-year institutions need a "comprehensive set of academic/learning support services and a supportive learning environment that attends to the affective as well as academic development of students" (Noel, 1985, p. 14). The supportive learning environment and attention to academic development needed to help at-risk students achieve academic success at the community college level can be provided by speech communication faculty both inside and outside of the classroom. In this paper, I will demonstrate that community college instructors who teach speech communication can reach out to at-risk students by providing relevance and structure in their daily lessons, by involving students in the learning process, by communicating the benefits of successful completion of coursework, and by motivating students to achieve. In addition to the aforementioned activities, I will suggest that speech-communication professors are ideally suited to communicate the caring and nurturing needed to help at-risk students succeed at the community college level, for caring and concern is demonstrated by the same interaction skills that are taught in speech-communication courses. Furthermore, speech communication professors can reach out to at-risk students outside of the classroom by interacting with such students during office hours, while engaging in special activities, and when participating in student advising sessions.

In the classroom

Relevance, Structure, and Involvement

At-risk students at the community college level can achieve academic success when taught in terms of a highly structured format which stresses relevant, practical skill-building (Valverde, 1985). The focus on relevant, practical skill-building is an important factor in student persistence (Forrest, 1982; 1985). In terms of relevancy (my personal bias not withstanding), I cannot think of a more applicable course to promote effective social functioning than one in speech-communication. The speech-communication professor must reach out to at-risk students by communicating this relevancy and attempting to relate the course to students' lives. For example, in discussion and/or public speaking courses, professors can mandate that students choose speech and discussion topics related to their major areas of study and therefore learn additional information about their chosen fields. Engleberg (1984) suggests that "discussion topics can range from 'The Adavantages of the Semi-Conductor Device' by a group of Electronic Technology majors to 'How to Control Periodontal Disease' by Dental Assistant majors" (p. 15).

Similarly, in an interpersonal skills course, class discussions can center on students' personal experiences that relate to communication concepts. For example, students can be asked to share personal examples concerning when they do or do not receive certain types of messages from others, times when they listen well or listen poorly, etc. Students can also be asked to keep personal journals which demonstrate their abilty to apply communication concepts to "real-life" situations. One excellent method

for demonstrating the relevance of a speech-communication course is to assign students homework that reflects the real-world nature of the communication material they learn. One exercise that I assign to my interpersonal skills students concerns responding nondefensively to criticism. While discussing the concept of defensiveness and techniques for responding nondefensively to others, students are asked to approach significant others and ask them to communicate how the student responds to criticism. After listening to their partners' responses, students write the comments down on paper and the significant others are asked to sign the paper if the descriptions are correct (the descriptions will be turned in for credit). The significant others are also told that in order to complete the assignment, the students must react nondefensively to criticism. The partners are instructed to criticize the students sometime prior to the assignment due date, so that the students will have an opportunity to respond nondefensively. Once again, the students write a description of these episodes and have the significant others sign the description in order to receive assignment credit. This assignment demonstrates to students that what they learn is directly applicable to their personal lives.

Finally, speech communication professionals can communicate the relevancy of their material by learning about their students and relating communication material to student interests. For example, if classes are small, professors can have students fill out personal information cards (containing information such as

the student's major, hobbies, place of employment, etc.). When explaining new concepts or skills, professors can specifically mention a student by name and relate the concept or skill to information related to that student (e.g., "While working at Restaurant X, what might John Doe say if he came across a customer who said . . ."). If classes are too large to obtain this type of personal knowledge, instructors can share examples from their own experiences or research to demonstrate the relevancy of material (Roueche et al, 1987).

In summary, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by demonstrating course relevance. The communication of course relevancy can be achieved by:

1. assigning speech or discussion topics related to students' majors
2. including students' personal examples (obtained from class discussion, journals, etc.) in the teaching process
3. assigning homework that reflects the real-world nature of material (e.g., having students communicate with significant others)
4. relating course material to aspects of students' personal lives (e.g., occupations)

In addition to communication about the relevancy of subject areas, community college professors can help at-risk students achieve academic success by providing structure in their courses.

Researchers have discovered that "high-risk students prefer formalized instruction, teacher-directed lessons, predictable goals, and certain types of tests and reading assignments. They also desire immediate closure in teacher-announced projects and test dates" (Valverde, 1985, p. 86). This type of formalized instruction:

> has the individual at its center, with the instructor always involved. It is instruction that allows students to progress through sequentially developed steps that move them from the simple to the more complex at a pace and at a level of mastery that both they and the teacher have agreed upon prior to the learning process . . . . The learning activities should be varied to prevent boredom and should be relevant to other courses and to students' lives (Roueche & Roueche, 1985, p. 295)

Community college professors can create such a system of instruction by suggesting applications of the information and skills that they are teaching and by carefully structuring material from the simple to the complex as each new idea is introduced (Roueche et al, 1987). For example, most speech-communication courses begin with a discussion of the communication process (source, message, receiver, etc.). These simple concepts can be applied to the more complex topic of nonverbal communication, which in turn can be applied to the complex topic of listening, and so on.

Community college professors can also create structure by making clear our expectations and demands of students both orally

and in course syllabi. We can provide students with a tentative schedule that covers topics to be discussed, chapters to be read, assignments that will be due, and tests that will be administered. Additionally, speech communication professors can begin each class by quickly reviewing previous material and by asking students a few questions about new concepts learned during the previous lesson. Professors can also end each period with a quick preview of the material that will be covered in the next class session. In the same vein, speech communication professors can daily write a scaled-down lesson plan or outline on the class chalkboard or overhead, so that students will know exactly what material will be covered and what in-class learning activities are scheduled. These techniques for providing course structure can help at-risk students persist in their studies, for at-risk students "are more likely to persist in classes where the teacher provides concrete tasks, where class goals are related to the ex-expectations of the class, where the class is relevant to life, and where the advertised program description is followed" (Pappas & Loring, 1985, p. 150).

In summary, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by providing structure in their courses. Course structure can be achieved by:

1. formalizing instruction
2. teaching in terms of a sequential development from the simple to the complex
3. including tentative schedules in syllabi

4. reviewing and previewing course material

5. making daily lesson plans available to students

In addition to relevancy and structure, student involvement is an integral ingredient in helping at-risk students at the community college level achieve academic success. Roueche and Roueche (1985) write that "instructors with an interest in great teaching will seek to provide structure in the classroom [and] at the base of such structure is the belief that great teaching, through creating a sense of involvement and a supportive environment, can make a difference to students" (p. 294). Furthermore, Forrest (1985) asserts that a high degree of learning occurs when students are actively involved in the learning process, and Roueche et al. (1987) assert that effective teachers manage to create student involvement in their classrooms.

In their study of teaching excellence, Roueche et al. (1987) interviewed a number of instructors whom the authors felt reflected the characteristics of effective teachers. Involvement techniques utilized by these instructors included having students bring texts to class so that they could refer to text photographs, charts, etc.; having students cite relevant newspaper and television programs related to the learning material; and having students frequently engage in oral class exercises in order to maximize participation. Adapting the aforementioned techniques to speech-communication courses would not be a difficult undertaking. For example, in my interpersonal skills course, I have students role-play in situations that deal with active listening,

defensiveness, and assertiveness, and students also participate in group problem-solving activities dealing with perception-checking, abstract language, etc.

In summary, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by getting students involved in the learning process. Student involvement can be achieved by:

1. having students bring texts to class and referring to text material
2. having students cite media examples relevant to course material
3. utilizing a variety of in-class exercises

To conclude, community college professors can help at-risk students achieve academic success by making course material relevant to students' lives, by structuing courses, and by involving students in the learning process. Forrest (1985) underscores the importance of this type of instruction when he writes that:

> There is evidence that a relationship exists between instructional style and learning and persistence rates among students . . . . Students will learn more, will be more likely to persist to graduation, and graduates will be more satisfied when the instruction is [structured] and develops relevant skills and knowledge. These conclusions support the suggestions . . . for making learning an active, individualized process through internships and other forms of

experiential learning, in-class presentations and debates, simulations in appropriate subjects, and using practitioners as visiting teachers. (p. 74)

Benefits and Motivation

In addition to relevance, structure, and student involvement, community college professors can help at-risk students achieve academic success by communicating the benefits associated with persisting in their courses, and by motivating their students to succeed. Pappas and Loring (1985) directly relate communicating course benefits to student persistence when they write that "an important factor in a student's entering and persisting in a program of adult education is the ability of the institution to effectively communicate what that program is about and how it will benefit the adult student" (p. 146). Similarly, Noel (1985) asserts that not only must "conscious efforts . . . be made in those first class meetings to reach students, to identify in specific ways the importance of that course, and how it is going to have value to them later on" (p. 21), but that on a daily basis, faculty should vividly and realistically communicate exactly how the course will contribute to students functioning effectively in adult roles.

Speech communication professionals can communicate the benefits of course persistence in a variety of ways. One method I employ in my interpersonal skills course is to have students fill out a communication survey on the first day of class. Each item on the survey relates to a unit that will be discussed during the

term, and students are asked to describe a situation pertaining to each item in which they have experienced "trouble" (e.g., Can you tell a family member or close friend that you love him/her? Have you ever communicated detailed explanations or instructions and have been misunderstood?). After filling out the survey and handing it in, students are told that each question relates to a unit that will be covered in the course, and that with the acquisition of new communication knowledge and skills, they should be be able to effectively interact in their problematic communication situations at the end of the semester. Throughout the term, I make reference to each item on the survey as the course progresses from one unit to another, and I specifically suggest how the material being covered can help those individuals who have had problems in any particular area. Finally, at the end of each semester, the communication surveys are returned to the students and they are instructed to participate in a communication situation that they had originally identified as problematic (e.g., those students who mentioned that they cannot express their emotions to family members or close friends are instructed to do so according to the guidelines discussed in class, and those students who have had problems explaining detailed ideas and directions are instructed to do so by avoiding abstract words and by using behavioral descriptions). This communication activity and assignment consistently reinforces the benefits of succeeding in the interpersonal skills course.

In summary, speech-communication professors can reach out to

at-risk students at the community college level by communicating the benefits of persisting in their courses. Course benefits can be communicated by:

1. directly stating both long-term and short-term benefits that can be obtained by taking the course
2. using surveys concerning course material in a "pre-test" and "post-test" mode

In addition to knowledge of course benefits, the motivation of at-risk students has been linked to student success. Beal and Noel (1980) cite a study that shows that high-risk students who score high on achievement motivation have less tendency to drop out of school. Similarly, Anderson (1985) suggests that students who are underprepared and who have weak academic skills need to spend more time on their studies than those who are academically prepared for higher education. However, "those with weak motivation and adjustment skills will be less likely to overcome the obstacles that the college experience presents than those who are highly motivated" (Anderson, 1985, p. 47). In addition, it has been demonstrated that at-risk students who participate in a short course in achievement motivation exhibit higher grade point averages, higher transfer rates to other institutions of higher education, and have higher percentages of graduation than do students in a control group (Beal & Noel, 1980).

Community college professors can foster motivation in at-risk students by structuring course material, focusing on relevant skill building, and by involving students in the educational

process (Forrest, 1982). Additionally, communicating the bene-benefits of successfully completing a communication course will motivate students in that "to be motivated to learn, students need to be convinced that the learning activities are exciting and will result in knowledge and skills they think are important" (Forrest, 1982, p. 5). Other methods for creating student motivation include believing in and communicating about a student's ability to achieve and using a student "steering group" to determine comprehension of material, how to pace the course, and to determine whether a need exists for further practice of skills (Roueche et al., 1987). Of course, communicating high expectations may produce anxiety for at-risk students, "therefore it is important to set those expections in a supportive climate that will allow students the freedom to be creative, to try, fail, try again and succeed" (Roueche et al, 1987, p. 148). Additionally, "teachers who aim high generally produce better results [and] in general, the higher the learning shown by the class as a whole" (Roueche et al., p. 149).

In summary, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by increasing their motivation to learn. Student motivation can be achieved by:

1. communicating the benefits associated with the course
2. communicating positive feedback about students' ability to achieve
3. utilizing student steering groups

4. having high expectations

Caring and Concern

Communicating course relevance, utilizing structure, creating student involvement, communicating the benefits of course persistence, and inspiring motivation are teaching methods that must be combined with an attitude of caring and concern for students in order to aid those who are at-risk. Noel (1985) reports that a "caring attitude of faculty and staff is viewed as the most potent retention force on campus" (p. 17). In addition, Roueche and Roueche (1985) write that students will remain in environments in which they feel comfortable and satisfied, and that educators who demonstrate love and concern for others and have the ability to create a positive learning environment will help to retain students. In fact, it has been found that the most positive factor in student retention across two-year public and private schools is the caring attitude of faculty and staff (Beal & Noel, 1980). The interpersonal skills that are characteristic of the affective dimension that is so necessary for the persistence of at-risk students include listening, empathy, and rapport.

It is interesting to note that when considering the affective realm of education, speech-communication professors are ideally suited to help at-risk students at the community college level achieve academic success. By the very nature of the subject, speech communication professors must demonstrate caring and concern, for these are the interpersonal abilities that we teach.

Similarly, we are considered "the experts" when it comes to knowledge and understanding of these interpersonal skills, and we should be able to demonstrate them with ease.

One method for demonstrating care and concern is exhibiting the interpersonal skill of listening. When students realize that they are being listened to, they feel worthwhile and that their thoughts are important (Roueche et al., 1987). Roueche and Roueche (1985) specifically suggest that instructors demonstrate listening behaviors that students need to learn and display, and they deplore the fact that "teachers are the poorest of listeners" (p. 289-290). Speech-communication professors are fortunate in that while teaching listening skills to students, we can demonstrate our own listening abilities and therefore project an attitude of caring and concern. However, although many academics cannot listen well, faculty are not the only individuals who exhibit poor listening ability. Research shows that students are poor listeners (Roueche & Roueche, 1985). This fact may further diminish a professor's ability to demonstrate caring and concern:

> In general, students now enrolling in college . . . do not listen well and tend to either stop listening or to begin taking notes indiscriminately. Their inability to listen well obscures the important points in lectures or discussions, and their inadequate processing of information results in an unthought-out, random selection of facts. It is in the face of these troublesome classroom realities that many instructors become perplexed and discouraged . . .

(Roueche & Roueche, 1985, p. 294)

It is therefore imperative that speech-communication professionals listen well to students, not only to aid those at-risk, but also to enable all students to learn and model effective listening behavior.

In order to demonstrate care and concern by means of listening, instructors need to respond in a meaningful way based upon what is heard (Roueche & Roueche, 1985). They also need to check their interpretation of student responses by paraphrasing those responses, and by noting student nonverbal cues when giving feedback (Roueche et al., 1987). For example, if a student seems angry when referring to a test score, a professor might say "You sounded upset when you mentioned your 'C' grade. Let's talk about this after class."

In addition to demonstrating listening skills, speech-communication professionals can exhibit caring and concern by displaying empathy and by creating a sense of rapport with students. Once again, speech-communication professors are ideally suited to manifest such behaviors in that we have expert knowledge about these behaviors and teach them to our students in many of our classes. Empathy involves the ability to understand a world-view from another persons' perspective, and rapport concerns maintaining a mutually positive and approving relationship with students (Roueche & Roueche, 1987). Both of these affective characteristics are important in helping at-risk students achieve academic success. For example, Moore and Carpenter (1985) write that one

reason at-risk students drop out of developmental courses is a lack of empathy on the part of instructors. Similarly, establishing a sense of rapport through faculty-student interaction contributes to a student's desire to stay in school (Roueche & Roueche, 1987).

In order to demonstrate care and concern by means of empathy and rapport, a variety of techniques can be utilized by speech-communication professionals. As previously indicated, "efforts to get to know students, initially by name and then through more personal knowledge of their background and interests, demonstrate caring and concern" (Roueche & Roueche, 1985, p. 286). Instructors can create a sense of rapport by treating students with respect; that is, introducing students to colleagues, holding telephone calls until faculty-student conferences have been completed, etc. Similarly, empathy can be demonstrated by orally praising students, writing notes of praise on exams and assignments, congratulating students who receive "A's" on tests inside the classroom, and even by giving hugs (Roueche & Roueche, 1987). Similarly, when teaching empathy in the speech-communication class, instructors can share their personal feelings, and in so doing, they can encourage students to share their own (Roueche et al., 1987). Finally, Beal and Noel (1980) report a study that demonstrates that when at-risk students are sent letters of care and concern, the results are higher grade point averages and higher re-enrollment of the students. In addition, sending letters to at-risk students can demonstrate empathy and a desire to

create an atmosphere of rapport.

In summary, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by demonstrating caring and concern. Caring and concern can be communicated by:

1. exhibiting the interpersonal skill of listening
2. making use of paraphrasing to check interpretations of student responses
3. attending to students' nonverbal cues
4. displaying empathy and rapport by getting to know students, treating students with respect, and by praising students
5. sharing personal feelings and encouraging students to share their own
6. sending letters that demonstrate care and concern

Educational support strategies

Listening, empathy, and rapport demonstrate the care and concern needed to help at-risk students succeed. Similarly, educational support strategies can exhibit the affective dimension of education needed to aid at-risk students at the community college level. One such support strategy concerns promoting student self-concept. Valverde (1985) writes that academic problems may not be "due to innate lack of ability but to inadequately developed skills and low self-concept resulting from poor school environments and negative attitudes on the part of their teachers" (p. 86). While successful educational programs include monitoring student progress and an emphasis on improving the

self-concept, most developmental and general education courses don't deal with student self-concept (Haughey, 1982). Haughey (1982) asserts that "many instructors, counselors, and administrators have come to recognize the importance of self-concept development in student learning; they suggest that colleges emphasizing self-concept development have greater success with high-risk students" (p. 86).

Many interpersonal communication courses teach students about the self-concept, and speech-communication professionals can not only educate students about the self-concept, but as an educational support strategy, can strive to improve the self-concept as well. This can be accomplished through praise of oral and written work, and by means of in-class activities and exercises. For example, in my interpersonal skills course, students are taught that "bragging" is not the same as recognizing positive qualities and accomplishments about the self. Students are assigned to think of a minimum of three qualities and/or accomplishments about themselves of which they are proud, and then they share these qualities and accomplishments with the class. Although some students are extremely reticent, with encouragement from classmates and myself, they eventually manage to share their positive characteristics. Similarly, students are also taught not to confuse "can'ts" with "won'ts." In front of the class, students are asked to complete the sentence "I can't . . . " (e.g., pass math class, turn in my journal on time, etc.). After a discussion about the distinction between personal

faults versus lack of desire and motivation, students are then asked to utter the same sentence in front of the class, substituting the word "won't" for "can't." In this manner, students learn that what they originally attribute as a negative characteristic on their part is really a choice that they make. In the same vein, students are taught about the self-fulfilling prophecy, and are assigned an exercise to replace negative self-described personality characteristics with positive ones. For example, if students habitually label themselves as "failures," they are asked to think of times and situations in which they do not fail. They are also asked to visualize "borrowing" behaviors they exhibit when they do not fail, and to apply the behaviors to the times when they do fail. This assignment allows students to realize that negative personality characteristics need not become self-fulfilling prophecies. Students see that because they act in a negative way in the past, it doesn't mean that they are forever doomed to repeat the behavior.

In addition to teaching and fostering a positive self-concept, a similar educational support strategy that can be used to help at-risk students attain academic success at the community college level deals with the management of anxiety. Many at-risk students may suffer from test anxiety, and these emotional reactions can inhibit effective functioning in test-taking situations. Along with content-based curriculum, educators can teach students ways to minimize their anxiety in order to enhance students' learning abilities (Weinstein, 1982).

For example, students are taught rational emotive therapy (replacing irrational thoughts and negative self-talk with rational thoughts and positive self-talk) in my public speaking course. While this method, along with systematic desensitization (a technique that teaches individuals to relax their muscles so that their bodies won't "tell" them that they are nervous) is used to teach students how to manage their emotions prior to giving a speech, it can be used in other speech communication classes as a way to teach students to manage their anxiety no matter what the situation (e.g., taking a test, asking a professor for a grade change, etc.). Similarly, Weinstein (1982) exemplifies how to combine cognitive information-processing strategies and the management of anxiety when she writes that:

> A pause to review and answer student questions before continuing with a lecture provides a good time to talk about self-review and the role that self-testing can play in consolidating new learning and in identifying areas of misunderstanding or confusion. Explaining how this teaching strategy can be used as an individual learning strategy and why it is helpful would not take very much time away from regular instructional activities. The announcement of a test is an excellent time to present strategies for test preparation and for coping with test anxiety. A brief discussion of negative self-talk and how to turn it into positive self-talk can introduce students to this powerful self-management skill. (p. 92)

In summary, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by making use of educational support strategies. Educational support strategies include:

1. bolstering students' self-esteem by praising oral and written work
2. using in-class activities that recognize positive qualities and accomplishments about the self
3. teaching students anxiety-management techniques (e.g., rational emotive therapy and systematic desensitization)
4. teaching students cognitive information-processing strategies

To conclude, community college professors can help at-risk students achieve academic success at the community college level by communicating course relevance, creating course structure, and utlizing student involvement, in addition to communicating the benefits of course persistence, motivating students to stay enrolled, and by demonstrating the affective dimension of education through caring and concern and through the use of educational support strategies.

Outside of the Classroom

Just as community college professors can help at-risk students achieve academic success inside of the classroom, they can also aid at-risk students by interacting with such students outside of the classroom. In fact, students judge how receptive

faculty are to out-of-class interaction by their experiences with professors inside of the classroom, and "the occurrence of largely informal contacts with faculty outside of the classroom appears as a consistent factor distinguishing those who stay [in school] from those who voluntarily withdraw" (Tinto, 1985, p. 37). It has further been established that both the quality and the frequency of out-of-class informal interaction with faculty is important in influencing potential dropouts to persist, and that this type of interaction has a significant impact on students who are at-risk (Roueche & Roueche, 1985). There are many opportunities for speech-communication professors to help at-risk students outside of the classroom. These opportunities include interacting with students during office hours and while engaging in special activities, and interacting with students during advising sessions.

Office Hours and Special Activities

One ideal period of time when most full-time faculty can engage in out-of-class interaction with students occurs during office hours. Roueche and Roueche (1987) write that "a teacher who is available before and after class or during office hours is more likely to have good rapport with students" (p. 150), and a sense of rapport can help at-risk students persist in their studies. If classes are small, speech-communication faculty can facilitate students visiting during office hours by making visits a required part of the course. For example, at the beginning of a semester, faculty can assign students a ten minute office hour

visit for the purpose of getting to know the students. Similarly, a second visit can be assigned sometime during mid-term, in order to monitor student progress and to further familiarize themselves with students.

Additional opportunities for out-of-class interaction with students entail involvement in club activities and other special events. In addition to donating a few hours of time to help with fund-raisers, special activities, etc. in order to increase opportunties for interaction with students, community college faculty can encourage at-risk students to participate in club activities to help them achieve a sense of "belongingness" on campus. Furthermore, community college faculty can offer a few hours of help during orientation sessions and summer programs for new and/or at-risk students. Faculty can engage in "rap" sessions regarding their specialties, talk about careers, or just answer general questions about the college or university. "This kind of interaction affords students the opportunity to see faculty in both academic and nonacademic settings. It also contributes to a sense of belonging and friendship, and demonstrates the human dimension of university life" (Collins, 1982, p. 82).

Advising

In addition to interacting with students during office hours and while participating in special events, speech-communication faculty can engage in out-of-class interaction with students during advising sessions. Noel (1985) suggests that "in academic advising and career planning offices as well as in their class-

rooms . . . students need to encounter the mentor, the faculty member, the adult, the trained professionals who can facilitate student decision-making on a one-to-one basis" (p. 13). Very often, this individual will be the speech-communication professor, for many community colleges require that faculty engage in student advising. Speech-communication professionals can help at-risk students achieve academic success in their role as advisors by demonstrating the same type of caring and concern that they demonstrate inside of the classroom. Noel (1985) writes that high-quality advising is rated as a critical retention factor, and that advising services should entail the same type of support and attention that students need to receive from faculty inside of classrooms. Additionally, Crockett (1985) suggests that "advising is not the only context in which a caring attitude toward students can be demonstrated; it does, however, represent an opportunity for a significant one-on-one relationship between faculty/staff and students to develop" (p. 245). Advising programs which utilize faculty who demonstrate care and concern towards their students can significantly impact retention efforts. Gordon (1985) asserts that:

> it has been demonstrated that quantity and quality of faculty-student interaction has a direct impact on retention perhaps because interaction with faculty increases social and academic integration. If there is an active, involved, ongoing relationship between students and faculty advisors, a faculty advising system can be an im-

portant ingredient in the retention process. (p. 127)

To summarize, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by:

1. interacting with students during their office hours
2. engaging in special activities
3. participating in student advising sessions.

Conclusion

Community college students can be characterized by factors that typically relate to students at-risk. On the whole, community college students are members of minority groups, older, attend school on a part-time basis, have taken on family responsibilities, and are less well-prepared than students in four-year colleges and universities. Although most community colleges utilize special programs and courses designed to reach at-risk students, it is the community college professor who plays the pivotal role in helping at-risk students achieve academic success. Community college professors in general, and speech-communication professors in particular, can reach out to at-risk students in a variety of ways. Inside of the classroom, speech-communication professors can provide relevance and structure in their everyday lessons. They can also involve students in the learning process, communicate the benefits of successful completion of coursework, and motivate students to achieve. Additionally, community college professors must communicate caring and concern for students, and they can encourage students to

succeed by by implementing educational support strategies. Outside of the classroom, speech-communication professors can reach out to at-risk students at the community college level by interacting with students during office hours, engaging in special activities, and when participating in student advising sessions.

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